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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

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on Monday, 26 March 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DESPOUY (Argentina)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION (agenda item 6) (continued) (E/CN.4/2001/20, 21 and Corr.1 and 22; E/CN.4/2001/NGO/5, 11, 28, 38, 41, 57, 58, 61, 62, 73, 155, 162 and 164; E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/11 and Corr.1; A/55/304)

Special debate on tolerance and respect (continued)

1. Mr. RIDGEWAY said that one approach to the troubling issue of racism was to embrace the "cold peace". There was a need for cultural pluralism and diversity in a society, yet they could also - like globalization - arouse tensions. The study of history was undoubtedly beneficial, in order to obtain a sense of cultural understanding and identity. The latter could be achieved technically in a multicultural society, such as Australia aspired to be, by recognizing dual citizenship, so that immigrants could become Australian while retaining their own nationalities. For indigenous peoples the issue was rather to ensure that their cultural identity was recognized. A striking aspect of the Olympic Games held in Sydney in 2000 had been the emergence of the athlete, Cathy Freeman, as a symbol of the reconciliation process within the country after two centuries of colonization. Symbolism was an essential aspect of the healing process.

2. The backlash of resentment in a country was a product of the original iniquity itself. The indigenous people of Australia were not, however, seeking compensation but merely an acknowledgement of their culture. It was essential in the twenty-first century that indigenous peoples be included in national partnerships. Above all, the need for education must be acknowledged and promoted. Only thus would a critical mass for change be created: a change of hearts and minds.

3. Ms. SADIK, addressing the topic from the gender perspective, said that tolerance and respect were core values in any society and should apply equally to women and to men but the fact was that relations between men and women were unequal and inequitable in most, if not all, societies. Ethnic and sectarian intolerance and religious extremism had caused innumerable conflicts and continued to play havoc with the lives of many. In all such situations women suffered disproportionately.

4. Moreover, neglect and discrimination cost many women their health and even their lives. For example, pregnancy and childbirth were the single biggest cause of ill health among women of reproductive age in developing countries. Over half a million women died each year and many times that number suffered illness or injury. Some 2 million girls between 5 and 15 were forced into the commercial sex trade each year. Trafficking for sexual purposes was the most rapidly expanding segment of organized crime, affecting an unknown but rapidly increasing number of women. Large numbers of girls and women were at risk of female genital mutilation every year. Young women in high-prevalence communities were five to six times more likely to be HIV-positive than men in the same age group. One woman in three would suffer violence during her lifetime, usually at the hands of a partner or spouse. Two thirds of the world's illiterates were women and girls as were two thirds of the world's poorest people. Furthermore, in any situation where respect for human life and well-being was in question, whether in war or

natural disaster, the situation of women was almost always worse than that of men. It was also harder to establish and maintain civil rights for women than for men, in such areas as marriage and divorce, property and inheritance, education and employment, voting and representation.

5. Such problems existed in all countries. They might be less pronounced in more prosperous communities, but even in the richest societies women were more likely to suffer hardship as a result of divorce, earned less for the same work and were less likely to reach the highest ranks of their professions. Neither economic development nor modernization of traditional societies would in themselves ensure tolerance and respect for women. Although all cultures had unique and positive values, which should have maximum scope for their expression, no culture worthy of the name found it acceptable to discriminate against or oppress women. Where such practices occurred, they were the result of cultural perversion. A good example was female genital mutilation, which was still sometimes claimed to be culturally appropriate. There was, however, no justification whatever in culture or religion for such mutilation and it was gratifying that countries were increasingly legislating against it.

6. How a culture absorbed the impact of change was the test of its resilience, since change might alter some cultural practices and render others obsolete but would not affect a culture's core values. A good example was slavery, which had been a feature of many societies in the past but had come to be universally condemned. Similarly, the tight control over women's fertility, formerly exercised for dynastic or property reasons, had become unacceptable. Rape and incest, which had previously often led to the ostracization of the girl or woman concerned, were acknowledged to be crimes.

7. The international human rights treaties drew their binding force from their capacity to express the values essential to all cultures. There was continuing debate in all countries about precise interpretations of human rights and their relationship to national bodies of law and practice. Such a debate, which was materially assisted by such instruments as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, was healthy and should be encouraged. International instruments allowed countries and the international process to take positive action to redress old wrongs.

8. No rights were more important than the right to education and the right to health, including reproductive health. It had taken some time for the latter to be accepted as a human right, and it had yet to be fully implemented in all countries, but it was fundamental to the empowerment of women. It included not only safe motherhood and protection against unwanted pregnancy together with protection against infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, but also protection against gender-based violence and sexual abuse. Establishing and maintaining that right was the very essence of toleration and respect for women, even though great efforts were needed to maintain them in difficult circumstances.

9. Successive international agreements on universal education had not yet ensured equality between women and men. Women's right to employment and to equality in employment was also frequently ignored. In some cases women were prevented from entering the workplace or, conversely, economic hardship might force women into paid employment against their will. Opportunities for promotion were often blocked. Laws existed in many countries against such practices, but they were hard to eradicate.

10. Women migrants were also vulnerable. They might be discriminated against or they might be prevented by practices in their own communities from entering fully into their new world. Innovative programmes could help, but there were several industrial countries which drew immigrants for work but found it hard to assimilate or accommodate their cultural differences. In such cases education and acclimatization were needed for the host communities as much as the immigrant one.

11. Tolerance and respect should lead to an examination of all assumptions concerning gender relations, including sexual behaviour. Young people, in particular were at the leading edge of rapid change yet also at the most impressionable and vulnerable stages of their emotional lives. She questioned whether it was enough simply to restate the old values in the old way. She commended a delegate from a Catholic country who, in a debate on HIV/AIDS, had said that, although he might deplore his daughter's sexual activities, he would not deny her the information and the means to protect herself from unwanted pregnancy or infection. The various international conferences on human rights during the 1990s, culminating in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, to which all Member States had agreed, had shown that it was possible for reasonable people to disagree but also to reach a consensus on action.

12. Mr. PECCOUD (International Labour Organization (ILO)), addressing the migration aspect, said that the gap between the beneficiaries of globalization and those excluded from its financial, technological, medical, educational and social benefits was widening, both within and among countries. It was hardly surprising that people from the poorest countries should seek employment in wealthier countries in the hope of providing for themselves and their families. New information and communication technologies had opened the window still wider on the tantalizing prospect of consumer wealth. Many would-be emigrants, skilled and unskilled alike, were caught in the clutches of unscrupulous private agencies offering full immigration arrangements. Such agencies were often in collusion with potential employers in developed countries who made no bones about exploiting the manpower of illegal immigrants.

13. Meanwhile, and as a reaction to all-triumphant market ideology, religious, ethnic or ideological fundamentalism was on the increase. It propagated hatred and discrimination based on gender, religion or ethnic origin, and its victims had no alternative but to attempt to leave their countries by whatever means were available to them.

14. Over the past few decades, host countries had become increasingly attractive because of markedly reduced transportation and communication costs, as well as the presence of diaspora colonies offering the promise of continued links with the home country. If an immigrant was to stay for a short while, respecting the person's rights meant enabling him or her to maintain contact with the home country whereas, in the case of a long-term immigrant, it involved ensuring his or her assimilation into the host society. A country such as Switzerland, with less than 2 per cent unemployment, had no difficulty in accommodating 20 per cent of immigrants in its population. Indeed, its citizens had recently rejected a proposal to reduce that percentage. Meanwhile, however, certain neighbouring countries with a much higher rate of unemployment manifested intolerance towards a much smaller number of immigrants.

15. Everything possible must be done to ensure that the human dignity and the contribution of the immigrants were recognized. Not only were they often indispensable, particularly in the services sector, but they would be increasingly needed as the population of the developed countries became older. Politicians, trade unions, employers and other civil society actors, including the media and religious organizations in particular, had all a responsibility to educate the public by promoting respect for immigrants and combating intolerance. That responsibility was particularly marked in respect of the poorest people, the illegal immigrants.

16. It was also necessary to expose national immigration policies designed to reassure the electorate by imposing well-publicized draconian measures on immigrants, but which actually stimulated illegal trade in visas and made cheap labour available to boost the competitiveness of enterprises.

17. With a view to strengthening the legal protection for migrants, States should ratify the 1990 Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families as a matter of urgency, as well as the relevant ILO conventions. The wealthier States were particularly remiss in that regard. Could it be that they viewed migrants simply as production automatons whose human rights could be ignored? Being aware since its inception that social discrimination had the potential to destabilize societies, ILO had always sought to ensure that women and men could work in conditions of dignity, freedom and security, in the interests of sustainable development. To that end, it would continue to urge not only that immigrants be tolerated but that they be truly respected.

18. Ms. BRASLAVSKY (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that, while there was no denying that racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance were deeply ingrained in the minds of most people, they were in permanent combat with the instinct for tolerance, respect, learning and intercultural enrichment which lay equally deep. If both strands were recognized, improvement was possible. For example, some textbook editors had produced samples that were magnificently illustrated but all the pupils portrayed were boys. In another case, an influential non-governmental organization (NGO) engaged in combating corruption had prepared a poster to illustrate the fact that society was not divided neatly into the corrupt and the honest but that there was a continuum between the two extremes. To illustrate its proposition, however, the figure portraying extreme corruption was painted black while that portraying the greatest honesty was white.

19. In both cases, the illustrations had been altered before publication, but they had clearly reflected the unconscious effects of centuries of education both in the schools and in society. It was clear that to overturn such deeply entrenched discrimination was no easy matter. The task was to strengthen the positive aspects of human nature and the way to do so was to provide education that would regard tolerance and respect as an overall social and political requirement, not merely an academic one; to guarantee access for children of both sexes to worthwhile and equitable educational opportunities throughout their lives; and to ensure that educational standards were such as to promote tolerance and respect for every other group in society.

20. In conflicts between nations or groups, or in intergenerational tensions or various forms of discrimination, there was a general tendency to blame somebody else. In terms of education, "somebody else" could be the school, the family, the mass media, the market or one or another

religion. In fact, however, discrimination and intolerance lay somewhere in a complex interaction between practices existing in all those various aspects of life. The only remedy was to construct a strong alliance between them all, rendering them able, gradually, to ensure that their harmful features were removed.

21. That process was under way in many countries. In the most successful cases, results had been achieved by recognizing the essential equality of persons based on human dignity; the establishment of a legal framework enshrining that equality; the acknowledgment of the diversity of the ways in which human dignity could be expressed; a recognition that such diversity could not be synonymous with inequality of access to the goods and social services needed for personal, community and national development; the promotion of empathy towards others; and the promotion of a capacity for criticism of "our people".

22. On the basis of those principles, it was possible to isolate promising educational policies and practices that would strengthen an education in tolerance and respect. The first was to recognize that positive discrimination was necessary. Many countries had moved beyond the principle of offering the same education to all to one of giving more to those who had less and promoting the education of particularly disadvantaged groups, including women, indigenous peoples, immigrants, the poor and religious minorities.

23. Secondly, study plans and programmes had been introduced in many countries to incorporate the requirement to teach human rights and the principle of non-discrimination into modern history and geography at every level: in other words, the history not just of a colonial power, as was often the case, but also that of the local community was to be taught. Indigenous languages were also coming to be used for instruction in elementary and even in secondary schools. Tolerance and respect gained strength in countries with a tradition of both lay and religious education; since the former recognized the value of religions as expressions of cultures while the latter broadened the range of religions considered.

24. A third policy was the updating of textbooks and other teaching materials in many countries, thereby introducing a variety of perspectives and, indeed, introducing an element of controversy. According to that approach, each student had the right to express his or her own views and to contrast them, respectfully, with those of others. The actual way of teaching had also been improved in many institutions. Less emphasis was put on memorizing and the repetition by rote of information or moral precepts and more on comprehension and character building.

25. Increasing people's receptiveness to respect was by no means easy, for it had to be achieved through tension of various kinds, positive and productive though might be. For example, the introduction of indigenous languages as languages of instruction should be balanced against the need for those same communities to learn English and computing. However, a world in which only "English and computing" was learnt could become a barren one. It was an interesting fact that one of the characteristics distinguishing countries which achieved significant economic and social development was the number of hours devoted to art education, to self-expression and to symbolic and spiritual products. Comparative advantages went not to

robots but to aware and analytical human beings capable of living, producing and enjoying the collective spiritual and material wealth. It was they who would ensure the continuity of humanity.

26. Not all views of the world were accommodated in the schools. The Aymara people in Bolivia, for example, looked to the past because the future could not be seen. Nevertheless, their schools endeavoured to teach them about time and the future. Some African cultures did not use the decimal system but had five as their basic number, yet the schools did not take that into account. Schools, too, had to renew their ability to understand "the other" in order to strengthen tolerance and respect, concentrating as much on the emotional and spiritual side of life as on knowledge.

27. Dialogue was required if progress was to be made, since action without ideas was dangerous. It was in that spirit that her Organization was organizing a conference that would take place in Geneva at the same time as the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, but whose subject would be "education for all so as to learn to live together". Such factors as citizenship, social cohesion, cultural diversity, languages, new scientific developments, ethics and new technologies and the future of the school would be considered.

28. Mr. SOLARI (Argentina) having agreed with the previous speaker that education had a key role to play in promoting tolerance and guiding the emotions, said that his country had learned from its experience in dealing with a legacy of military dictatorship that there could be no true reconciliation without a full investigation of the truth. Even so, the pain remained.

29. Tolerance and respect involved not resigned acceptance but enthusiastic welcoming of diversity. A diverse society was not only fairer, it was also more interesting and more beautiful. It was only by pursuing a culture of diversity that it would be possible to counter those who viewed plurality as a menace. All countries must remain vigilant to the threat of intolerance. However, Argentina, for its part, was an example of cultural and religious diversity in action. Throughout its history, it had welcomed successive waves of immigrants: from Europe, Latin America and, more recently, from Asia.

30. Ms. GLOVER (United Kingdom) said that reality all too often fell short of international standards. Her Government condemned the persecution of individuals on the grounds of religion or belief and took every opportunity - often working with its European Union partners - to urge States to foster tolerance and mutual respect and to protect religious minorities from discrimination, intimidation and attacks. It took its own obligations very seriously in that domain, drawing strength from the diversity of British society. Freedom of religion and belief was protected under the new Human Rights Act, and additional legislation would be introduced to outlaw religious discrimination in the workplace and in training.

31. Intolerance was not the monopoly of the followers of any single religion, but occurred throughout the world, and in the name of many faiths. International law did not restrict freedom of religion or belief to any one religion. It was essential, therefore, to address persecution and intolerance against all faiths, since privileging the rights of one group could occur only at the expense of the rights of another. The international community should not accept the arguments

of those who dismissed international oversight of States' human rights obligations as being motivated by bias, while continuing to violate human rights. The defence of one faith must not be used as an excuse to suppress others. Her delegation would be interested to hear the panel's views on how to strike a balance between freedom of religion and belief on the one hand, and freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly on the other.

32. Mr. PÉREZ-VILLANEUVA Y TOVAR (Spain) said that his delegation attached the utmost importance to promoting tolerance and respect for religions and beliefs. Indeed, his Government would be shortly hosting an international consultative conference on school education in relation to freedom of religion and belief, tolerance and non-discrimination.

33. One of the fundamental issues to be tackled in the final document of that conference and subsequently was the nature of universal education to promote knowledge of the other through, inter alia, a more detailed study of comparative religion and religious and ethical cultures. He would welcome the panel's views on whether comparative religion should be taught as a separate subject or as part of other subjects such as history, ethnography, philosophy or civics.

34. Ms. JAMIL (Pakistan) said that the Constitution of Pakistan enjoined respect for the diversity of cultures in the country's national heritage, as well as freedom of religion and belief. Pakistani brethren from the minority communities were entitled to hold the Government accountable and, in so doing, they enriched public debate. Her Government believed that each nation and people had the right to practice their religion, beliefs and values unless they were aimed at harming others or incited hatred and violence.

35. Regrettably, Islamophobia had emerged in some parts of the world in the form of a virulent campaign to denigrate the values and traditions of Islam. Such a campaign hardly served the interests of tolerance and respect for diversity. It was a paradox that, as the world moved towards progress and scientific advancement, it also witnessed a rise in brutality and intolerance.

36. Rather than attempting to create a uniform world by destroying historical, cultural and religious values or artefacts cherished by others, a renewed effort should be made to respect and protect the world's cultural diversity. Pakistan, having experienced anguish at the total destruction of the historic Barb Mosque, well understood the pain felt by Buddhists at the destruction of the Bermudan statues in Afghanistan.

37. There was an urgent need to promote tolerance through education and to strengthen dialogue among the civilizations. New technologies and the media should be used with a greater sense of responsibility towards younger generations and not as a means of further brutalizing society: a society in which women and girls suffered not only physical and emotional humiliation and exploitation, but also the bleak future of economic difficulties following the loss of their dear ones through brutal killings. It was essential also to bring ongoing conflicts to an end and prevent the emergence of new ones, thereby lessening the barometer of violence in the world.

38. Ms. GERVAIS-VIDRICAIRE (Canada) said that tolerance, respect for diversity, and the accommodation of change were fundamental to the peaceful and prosperous coexistence of people. Ethnicity, race, language, culture, gender, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation and religion were all fundamental to a person's identity. From the Canadian perspective, tolerance was not sufficient; what was needed was respect. The embracing of diversity within a framework of democratic values and respect for human rights was essential to the economic and social vitality of society. It was essential, therefore, to ensure that cultural diversity was used to improve participation, strengthen cultural expression, create prosperity, and ensure that all nations benefited from the opportunity afforded by the global environment.

39. Diversity had afforded many advantages to Canada, including links with the rest of the world, a multilingual workforce and a vibrant cultural life. The particular place of indigenous peoples in Canada was central to its diversity of its culture, languages and history. Moreover, the central role of Canada's two official languages was a further example of its commitment to respect the diversity of its population.

40. His Government had consistently advocated effective measures to promote respect for diversity, in particular through education and public awareness initiatives at all levels. In view of the fact that educational systems shaped attitudes and behaviour, consideration should be given to ways of incorporating the contributions of individuals of diverse backgrounds into the school curricula. Further consideration should also be given to developing new educational tools for promoting acceptance and valuing all members of society.

41. Ms. RUIZ de ANGULO (Costa Rica) said that, in her country, children were taught tolerance and respect from a very early age. The most important factors in promoting tolerance in any society were the media, the educational system and the religious communities. Since the media reflected the outlook of society, it was essential that the religious and political leaders should urge the media to reflect a broad range of opinions, when commenting on events. The forthcoming World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance would be an opportunity to foster the concept of tolerance in schools, the press and religious groups. At the same time, she wished to emphasize that justice and equality of opportunity also contributed to the spirit of tolerance.

42. The fact that 2001 was the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, would also do much to foster a spirit of tolerance.

43. Mr. CHEPSIROR (Kenya) said that, given the increased discrimination shown by the media, public authorities and political parties, there was a need to implement policies that promoted mutual tolerance and respect among the various communities. The African Regional Preparatory Conference that had taken place in Dakar had come up with a number of recommendations in that regard. Firstly, legislation should be enacted to curtail political platforms and activities of organizations that encouraged intolerance. Secondly, States should establish national monitoring mechanisms and take steps to promote good inter-ethnic relations. Thirdly, the media should elaborate a code of conduct to prohibit the propagation of attitudes of racial superiority, hate and discrimination.

44. His delegation was disappointed at the minimal progress made thus far in promoting attitudes of tolerance and respect. It agreed with Ms. Braslavsky that education was the best way of promoting tolerance and that States should develop specific sensitization and training programmes to combat racism.

45. Mr. MENDONÇA E MOURA (Portugal) said that the call made at the previous meeting for an ethic that was neither religious nor anti-religious but simply centred on the human being was a very important contribution to the debate.

46. Noting that a recent study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had concluded that education could have not only a positive but also a negative role (when it was used as a means of preserving positions of privilege or manipulating history for political purposes and encouraging hate), he asked the panel what could be done to ensure that education was not misused in that way and whether there were professional groups that should be given priority in terms of human rights education. He wondered why the response by States to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education had been so poor and what United Nations organs could do to help States promote such educational activities.

47. Ms. PATERSON (Observer for New Zealand) said that tolerance needed constant encouragement because, even in an open society, it could be threatened by changes in political, economic or social conditions.

48. Education was, indeed, extremely important in promoting tolerance. Changes had recently been proposed in her country to improve the capability of the New Zealand Human Rights Institution to focus on its role of education. It had been recommended that the Institution should take a lead in promoting a society that respected the human rights of all members of society with all their differences.

49. Mr. AMIN-MANSOUR (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that diversity could be either a source of strength or a cause of division. Experience had shown, however, that policies of exclusion eventually led to harsh reactions and that the societies that survived were those that enjoyed a rich culture and had learnt to practice tolerance. In his view, the authorities, members of the elite and human rights advocates had a major role to play in enhancing understanding within a society, not least by setting a good example.

50. The year 2001 had been proclaimed the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Tolerance and respect for others were the cornerstone for dialogue, cooperation and development. He therefore called on all the members of the international community to promote tolerance throughout the world.

51. Mr. SUNGAR (Observer for Turkey), said that he wished to set the record straight concerning a reference made at the previous meeting by Archbishop Tutu to the so-called holocaust of Armenians, to use his exact words. His delegation did not accept that allegation because it knew the facts, which concerned its own history. What had occurred in the eastern sectors of the Ottoman State had been a civil war within a global war, not a genocide.

52. Ms. MARTENSSON (Observer for Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that she had two questions for the panel. She would like to know, firstly, how the mainstreaming of the gender perspective could promote tolerance and respect for diversity and, secondly, how training could best be used for prevention and as a tool to promote tolerance, diversity and access to human rights.

53. Mr. SABHARWAL (India) said that his Government had declared 2001 to be Women's Empowerment Year, the objectives being to create large-scale awareness of women's issues, to initiate and accelerate action to improve access to and control of resources by women and to create an enabling environment to enhance women's self-confidence and autonomy.

54. Intolerance and discrimination could not be eliminated simply by the adoption of laws. It was equally important to change social attitudes. Any society that wished to inculcate the values of tolerance and respect must harness the power of education. His Government would stand firm against all efforts to mould education to serve exclusivist ends, particularly attempts to turn children into cannon fodder.

55. Ms. SAUERBREY (United States of America) said that respect for others required respect for oneself. Self-esteem could not be developed unless a child believed that he or she had the same chance of success as others. The ability to read was the fundamental building block to education. Children who could not read tended to take out their feelings of inferiority on others, whereas children that did well in school tended to be more tolerant and were more likely to help others.

56. Many organizations had developed programmes to provide tolerance education for both children and adults. Such education was increasingly becoming part of the curriculum in the United States. One educational tool that had proved effective was to foster dialogue among groups that had demonstrated animosity towards one another. Religious groups could also play an important role in rebuilding society. A new programme in her country incorporated faith-based initiatives into Government efforts to provide reading assistance and to combat drug addiction.

57. Ms. IAMSUDHA (Thailand) said that gender discrimination was probably the oldest and most widespread form of discrimination in the world, and some societies accepted it more readily than others. Violence against women remained an issue of grave concern, and abuse of women was a social problem as well as an impediment to a country's development. Members of the international community should individually and collectively accelerate their efforts to promote the rights of women to be free from discrimination, to promote their rights in terms of reproductive health, their access to education, information, health, social services and decision-making processes. Gender mainstreaming was integral to the empowerment of women.

58. Education was not only an effective means of promoting human rights, including tolerance and respect with regard to gender, religion, migrants and other diversities, but was also an effective tool in ensuring that people were aware of human rights, understood them and knew how to exercise them. That education began in the home, and continued in the school. More use should also be made of the mass media to promote human rights and respect for diversity.

59. Mr. HERNÁNDEZ BASAVE (Mexico) said he shared the concerns expressed by earlier speakers regarding the use of the expression "illegal immigrants", which stigmatized and stereotyped all immigrants. There was general recognition that immigrants had made and continued to make valuable contributions to the societies in which they lived, and there was virtually general agreement, in his own region at least, that immigrants not in possession of proper immigration papers should not be criminalized as "illegal". Finally, he expressed his agreement with Mrs. Braslavsky that it was vital to redouble efforts in education at all levels.

60. Mr. KRISAFI (Observer for Albania) said that in his country there were excellent relations between the three main religions - Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism - and between Albanians and the ethnic minorities. Since the important changes in Albania in the 1990s, the country's traditions of good relations had been put on a legislative basis. The Constitution of November 1998 gave pride of place to human rights and fundamental freedoms, which met the highest modern standards. Albania had acceded to almost all the relevant international instruments, and had done much to spread awareness of human rights through its schools, in civil society and among State officials.

61. In the Albanian Parliament, there was a standing committee on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Albania also had a human rights ombudsman and a bureau for the protection of minorities. There was also a large number of NGOs operating in the field of human rights.

62. Despite the progress made in the past 10 years, however, there were still cases in Albania of individual officials in the police, in the justice system or in the administration who violated human rights. The Government spared no effort to identify such persons and to punish them severely.

63. Sheikh SAHIB BEN SHEIKH said that he had spoken at the previous meeting of a universal ethic common to all humanity, and had said that the content of that ethic must not be either religious or anti-religious. A religion which was sure of itself did not function as a dominating force. However, he might not have been sufficiently explicit in his opening statement. In certain parts of the Muslim world there was a barbarism which struck at the heart of Islam and made victims of innocent people. He was referring specifically to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Groupes Islamiques Armées (GIA) in his own country of origin, Algeria. He hoped everyone present would be in agreement with the statement that the international community condemned the theological version of and the understanding of Islam by the Taliban and the GIA, and did not condemn Islam itself.

64. Theology was not the same as faith. It was a human construct whose purpose was to elucidate the mystery that was faith and to rationalize it in order to make it more communicable. While the greatness of a religion did not stem from its theology, it was a catastrophe for a religion when its theology stagnated and became frozen in a far-off historical period. Islam's only authority was textual. Interpretation was for its believers. It was unfortunate, that, in recent centuries some Muslims had made sacrosanct the efforts of their ancestors and their theologians along those lines, giving rise to a certain tendency to "bedouinize" Islam.

65. The majority of Muslims did not do so, but there were certain tendencies which stemmed from frustration and which were dangerously out of kilter in the contemporary world. Islam was a universal religion with extraordinary values, and its thinkers and theologians should make an effort to desacralize its heritage.

66. Islam was marked by a concern for seeking justice, but the justice of one period, if it were allowed to stagnate, became an injustice for another period. The progress of one generation, if it stagnated, became a regression for another generation. No generation had the right to interpret or make laws for a future generation. Islam was an active partner in the international order, and should not be a competing or dominating force.

67. Ms. PONCINI (International Federation of University Women), speaking also on behalf of Zonta International, the International Council of Women, the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University and Soroptimist International, as well as in her position as President of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women which coordinated the Women/Gender/Children's Caucus, said that fundamental to the principle of tolerance was understanding why there were differences in human beings, and an acceptance of those differences. While human beings had all the tools to develop that knowledge and understanding, they had not harnessed them to cope with diversity, and were in fact exacerbating exclusion and rigidity in their prejudices. They had not transformed their minds to adapt to and respect diversity; they were still set on the rules of hierarchy and the quest for economic and political power.

68. Understanding must not only extend out to the changing external world, it must also reach into each individual's inner self. Human rights education was a key to providing a new vision of what was ethically, morally and socially responsible and equitable. Governments and the media had roles to play in creating a climate of non-violence that promoted multicultural society and economic empowerment. Gender inequality further compounded racial discrimination. Social development was a human right that had to go hand in hand with economic considerations and transactions.

69. Mr. ASGHAR NEMATI (Organization for Defending Victims of Violence) said that peaceful coexistence could not be promoted in multicultural societies unless people respected each other and tolerated their differences. The violence in Afghanistan, the Balkans and other parts of the world showed how a climate of lawlessness and disregard for human life and dignity resulted in violations of human rights. Political leaders should promote tolerance and respect and put an end to violence and discrimination.

70. But how could such tolerance and respect be effectively promoted? What could the constructive role of States, the United Nations and its agencies, NGOs, civil society and other actors be? The Commission on Human Rights attached the highest priority to education, dialogue, the rule of law and the protection and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as the most important factors in the effective promotion of the values of tolerance, respect and pluralism. Civil society, and particularly NGOs, also had a role to play in disseminating the importance of tolerance and pluralism through their awareness-raising activities.

71. Ms. GRANGE (International Catholic Migration Commission), speaking also on behalf of the Global Campaign for Ratification of the Convention on Migrants' Rights, said that, while the international community was elaborating an impressive and far-reaching body of treaties and other documents universally acknowledging the inherent dignity of all members of the human family, millions of men, women and children were in movement within and across borders fleeing violence, persecution, discrimination, abject poverty, unjust distribution of wealth, and man-made and natural disasters.

72. Some were called migrants, while others were called refugees, asylum-seekers or internally displaced persons. Some were even called "illegals". Who decided on the legality of a life, and what did that have to do with tolerance, dignity and respect? By immigration and asylum policies that criminalized "irregular" migrants, the receiving countries were fostering a climate of intolerance. The rise in discrimination, ostracism and xenophobia had surely something to do with closed-door policies, a fortress mentality and zero immigration programmes. Had the amalgamation of migration and trafficking in human beings something to do with distorted portrayals in the media and hostile attitudes in national populations? Had the absence of political will something to do with creating breeding grounds for the rise in intolerance, neo-nazism and religious fundamentalism? Forced migrants fled one set of evils only to be faced with denials of their human rights at the end of their painful journey.

73. Migrants with a number of years' residence should be allowed take part in local elections in the receiving countries. Appropriate structures should be put in place at the national level for their participation in decision-making that affected their lives and the lives of their communities. Their representatives should be included in national human rights commissions. Education programmes should acknowledge the positive elements in other traditions and cultures. States and civil society should use International Migrants Day to highlight the fact that migrants' rights were human rights and to emphasize that undocumented migrants needed protection. States should adopt coherent, transparent and just legal immigration frameworks, and should ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the relevant ILO conventions. The plan of Action of the forthcoming World Conference should contain a separate consolidated section on measures to promote and protect the rights of migrants.

74. Mr. PERERA (World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)), reviewing the Hebraic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Baha'i traditions, said that they all taught tolerance and respect. The Indian Emperor Asoka had inscribed on his rock pillars the statement that, by tolerating other religions, one elevated one's own. Everyone should take note of the statement in the Hindu Vedas that religion was the search for truth and that truth was like a diamond: the more sides it had the brighter it shone. The different sides of the diamond were the different religions of the world. Intolerance sullied that diamond and made it lose its lustre.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.